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Ombudsmen for American Government edited by Stanley V. Anderson

Warren Griffiths
Wilmington College

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OMBUDSMEN FOR AMERICAN GOVERNMENT. Edited by Stanley V. Anderson. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. Pp. 181. \$4.95.

This study, edited by Stanley V. Anderson for the American Assembly, examines the working of the Ombudsman in Sweden and Finland where the position is well established and accepted; describes its recent introduction into other countries at the national or provincial level; then investigates the problems and possibilities of its transfer to the United States.

The success of the Ombudsman in Finland and Sweden, and in some nine other countries where it has been introduced at the national or state level, is widely acknowledged. It is difficult, however, to present a clear picture of what the Ombudsman is and does. To be sure, he is an informal channel for citizen complaints, but his authority and procedures vary greatly from country to country. Sometimes he entertains complaints against administrators, legislators, the military, the police, and even the judiciary. In some countries the Ombudsman may initiate his own investigations and again the scope of his authority may be wide or narrow. In some cases he may be appointed by the executive, while in others he may be elected by and responsible to the legislature. In most instances, whatever the scope of his authority or manner of appointment, he has no formal corrective authority, but must rely on publicity, his reputation for impartiality, or on his persuasiveness with authorities against whom complaints are lodged to rectify any injustices he may have discovered.

The Ombudsman, in other words, is an official who provides a liaison between government and the public by variously cutting red tape, dealing with inefficiency, explaining unpopular administrative decisions misunderstood by the citizenry, or even attempting to correct cases of malfeasance. Publicity, impartiality and informality are the chief methods used in the exercise of this duty, but it is impossible to draw a precise image of the office and its power as a universal corrective. It is only possible to define what the Ombudsman is and does in the respective countries where that office exists. This the book does in considerable detail and with appreciation for the general success of the office.

The transfer of the Ombudsman to the United States must face the problem of our country's size and its numerous agencies of government, local and national. The thrust of this book seems to be that the office should be set up at local and state levels and that experimentation should then be made with various forms of the office. Indeed, this has already been done. To name but a few, Hawaii created the office of Ombudsman in 1967; Chicago has an office of Inquiry and

Information; New York City has its "Little City Halls"; Nassau County, New York, its Commissioner of Accounts; and the Law School of the State University of New York has its Citizens Administrative Service.

On all levels of our government, the office of Ombudsman is being considered. In some local jurisdictions, attempts to establish an Ombudsman have failed; in others the officers are currently operating. There is, in other words, an intense interest in the office but also some opposition, or at least hesitation, about moving rapidly. At the national level, Congressman Henry Reuss of Wisconsin, in 1963 and in subsequent sessions, introduced a bill to establish an Administrative Council of Congress to serve mainly as an agency to relieve Congressmen of their case work service to their constituents. Senator Edward V. Long of Missouri has introduced a bill to set up an Administrative Ombudsman to investigate complaints against a limited number of federal agencies. So far these proposals have made little headway.

This book describes the many efforts to adapt the Ombudsman to the United States and in some sense serves as a catalog of such efforts. Although not a definitive study of the Ombudsman, it does whet the appetite for further knowledge of the office and the possibilities of its successful application at our various levels of government. Some persons might question whether the Ombudsman should handle certain specific complaints, yet until we have decided on a precise model for the office, all possibilities should be investigated.

At the thirty-second meeting of the American Assembly, in October, 1967, the participants stated, "We recommend that Ombudsman offices be established in American local and state governments. We do not recommend that applications of the concept be undertaken at the federal level." This confidence in the applicability of the Ombudsman to the United States is reflected in the final chapter of the book, which contains Walter Gellhorn's Annotated Model Ombudsman Statute, a statute which Professor Gellhorn believes "can be adapted to the needs of various states with little change." At the moment, it appears that experimentation with the Ombudsman is well on its way in the United States.

Warren Griffiths, Ph.D.
Professor, History and Government
Wilmington College
Wilmington, Ohio